

Leland
SERIOUS
REFLECTIONS
ON THE
Present State of THINGS
IN
THESE NATIONS.

Being the CONCLUSION of
Dr. LELAND'S VIEW
OF THE
DEISTICAL WRITERS.

Now published separately, on Occasion of the
GENERAL FAST,
Which is appointed to be observed
On the Seventeenth of FEBRUARY next.
To which is prefixed

A PREFACE,
By the same HAND.

L O N D O N :

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REFLECTIONS

ON THE

PROGRESS OF THINGS

IN

THESE NATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN WORLD

BY

GEORGE

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF

THE

ACADEMY

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P R E F A C E.



IT is at the desire of some worthy Persons, whose authority and judgment have great weight with me, that I have consented to the republication of these Reflections. They were drawn up and published two years ago, under a deep and affecting sense of the then State of things among us, which seemed to yield very melancholy prospects. The dreadful Earthquake at *Lisbon*, in the consequences of which we were very nearly interested, seemed to have made great impressions upon persons of all orders and degrees; and we were, not without reason, apprehensive of the like awful visitation. We were also, at that time, entering upon a dangerous war with a very powerful and formidable enemy, in defence of those rights and possessions which are of great importance

importance to the prosperity, and even to the safety, of these kingdoms. Such was the situation of things, when an order was issued by public authority, and drawn up in very proper and pathetic terms, appointing a general and solemn Fast to be observed by his Majesty's subjects in these kingdoms, for humbling ourselves before God for our manifold sins and provocations, for averting his judgments, and imploring the continuance of his mercies towards us. About this time it was, that the following Reflections were first published, at the conclusion of a book which was written in Defence of our holy Religion. I wish it could be said with truth, and upon just grounds, that the state of things in these nations hath been so much altered for the better since that time, as to render any reflections of this kind unnecessary. But I am afraid, we have little reason to flatter ourselves, that we are become a more virtuous and reformed people. Through the great goodness of God we have not suffered under the dreadful calamities of earthquakes, or of the pestilence, the fears of which not long since alarmed us. But we are still engaged in a bloody and expensive War, and which, as far as these nations are immediately concerned in it, hath been carried on with very little success. Our enemies have in several instances been suffered to triumph over us. A very valuable part of our *European* Possessions hath been wrested from us, to our great loss and disgrace. In *America* we have met with a succession of disappointments, and instead of recovering

covering what the enemy had seized from us, have sustained new losses; and our Colonies and Provinces there have been exposed to the cruel insults of merciless and barbarous Savages. There hath been a visible blast upon the publick Undertakings. Even those of them which were most wisely planned, and seemed to bid the fairest for success, and concerning which we formed great Expectations, have been unaccountably baffled and frustrated. Nor has any thing great and glorious been hitherto accomplished by our mighty *fleets*, of which we are so apt to make our boast and confidence.

These things can scarce escape the notice of the most superficial Observer. Great complaints have been made, and strong resentments expressed against the supposed authors and instruments of the national disgraces and disappointments. But there seems not to have been a due regard had to the sovereign agency of Divine Providence, in disposing events for the correction and chastisement of a degenerate and backsliding People. It must be acknowledged, indeed, that second causes are not to be overlooked, and that enquiries into the immediate sources of publick evils and miscarriages, may be of great use towards remedying or preventing them for the future. But if we believe a Providence which presideth over events, especially those of a public nature, and in which the interests of large communities are concerned, we must not confine our views to second causes, but

must rise above them to the Supreme Disposer: And if there be reason to think, that there is a great decay of religion, and of public and private virtue, and a growing dissoluteness and corruption of manners among all orders and degrees of persons, we ought certainly to consider these things as having a great influence on the adverse events which have befallen us. If, as reason and Scripture teach us, God knoweth and observeth the dispositions and actions, even of particular persons; and otherwise, how shall he judge them, and call them to an account for their actions? then surely the state of nations, with regard to religion and morals, and their good improvement or abuse of the privileges and advantages they enjoy, must be perfectly known and observed by him: And if he perfectly knoweth it, it cannot be supposed, that he who is the wise and righteous Governor of the world beholdeth it with indifferency. National corruption, when once it becometh general, must be greatly displeasing in his sight, and we may therefore reasonably conclude, that he will, in that time and way which seemeth most fit to his governing wisdom and righteousness, manifest his just displeasure against it; especially considering, that, though the punishment of particular persons for their wickedness may be in a great measure reserved for a future state, it is proper that nations and large Communities, as such, should be rewarded or punished in this present world, in which alone they subsist.

It

It is not, therefore, without great reason, that a *General and Public Fast and Humiliation* is again appointed to be observed throughout these kingdoms, “ To humble ourselves before Almighty
 “ God, in order to obtain Pardon for our Sins,
 “ and in a most devout and solemn manner to
 “ send up our prayers and supplications to the Di-
 “ vine Majesty, for averting those heavy judg-
 “ ments, which our manifold sins and provoca-
 “ tions have most justly deserved, and imploring
 “ his blessing and assistance on his Majesty’s
 “ arms, and for restoring and perpetuating peace,
 “ safety, and prosperity, to his Majesty, and his
 “ kingdoms.”

And since the true end and design of such so-
 lemn seasons of prayer and humiliation, is to put
 us upon serious Recollection, and upon searching
 and trying our ways, in order to the rectifying
 and reforming whatever hath been or is amiss in
 our temper and conduct, the following Reflections
 may possibly be of some use in suggesting proper
 hints suitable to the occasion. Some persons may,
 perhaps, be apt to think, that the complaints of
 the national faults and vices are here too much
 exaggerated. I am sensible, that it hath been
 usual in all nations and ages to complain of the
 corruption and degeneracy of the times. And it
 is probable, that such complaints have sometimes
 proceeded rather from a discontented temper and
 a peevishness of spirit, ever prone to find fault, and
 give the worst turn to things, than from a pious
 and

and generous concern for the honour of God, and the interests of religion and virtue. It is not a wise thing to be always extolling former times, and always despising or condemning our own. But yet it cannot be denied by any one that is acquainted with the history of mankind, that in different nations, and in different ages and periods of the same nation, there is often a great difference observable as to the prevalency of religion and virtue, of good order and true public spirit: And that there are times in which there is a more general defection from all these, and more of an abandoned dissoluteness, luxury, and effeminacy, than in others: and where it is apprehended, that this is really the case, or that there is great danger of its being so, no man can be blamed, who, from an earnest desire to awaken men to a just and lively sense of the evil of their ways, and to promote, as far as in him lieth, a national repentance and reformation, endeavoureth not in the bitterness of a satyrical spirit, but with a serious and deep concern of mind, to represent the national vices and corruptions.

But whilst we humble ourselves before God for our manifold sins and provocations, and implore his mercy, which is the proper design of the approaching General Fast, we have great reason to be deeply sensible of his goodness and forbearance towards us, in that he hath not hitherto punished us as our iniquities have deserved. The sword of war, which hath caused such miserable devastations

tions in some of the neighbouring nations, hath not hitherto raged in our bowels. We are still continued in the possession and enjoyment of many valuable privileges and advantages. We have been blessed with a harvest, plentiful even beyond our hopes. But above all, nothing seems to yield more agreeable prospects, than what hath lately happened in *Germany*. To look but a few months back, how discouraging was the appearance! A mighty combination formed of the three most formidable powers in *Europe*, and which were afterwards joined by a fourth! The scheme was deeply laid, and threatened to produce fatal consequences to the Protestant interest, and the liberties of *Europe*. It seemed scarce possible, humanly speaking, that our Ally the King of *Prussia*, with all his abilities and fortitude, could have withstood the united efforts of so many powerful armies, which invaded him on all sides. No small part of his dominions was actually in possession of his Enemies: His very Capital was in danger: And the ONLY ARMY that might have caused a diversion in his favour, put out of a capacity of assisting him! In this extremity of his affairs, things have taken a surprising turn, which, considered in all its circumstances, is scarce to be paralleled in the history of past ages. The man must be void of reflection, that doth not observe in it the signatures of a divine hand. It is, indeed, but just that we should admire the wisdom and magnanimity, and heroic qualities, of this great Prince, and the discipline and intrepidity of his Troops, as well as

the spirit and courage with which others are now animated, who seemed quite intimidated before. But we must not make these things our confidence. Instead of indulging a vain security, or making flesh our arm, what hath now happened should turn our thoughts to a religious adoration of that sovereign Providence, which ruleth in the kingdom of men, which taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and overthroweth the mighty. How careful should we be to secure an interest in his favour, who, if we do not make a right improvement of his mercies, can, with equal facility, frustrate our most sanguine hopes, as in this instance he hath exceeded our highest expectations!

Upon the whole, we have every inducement to engage us to apply ourselves to the great work of repentance and reformation. The Goodness of God, and this late unexpected success, should lead us to it, as well as the many rebukes and disappointments we have met with. And we cannot better approve ourselves true friends and lovers of our country, than by joining in offering up our earnest prayers and supplications for mercy to the nations to which we belong, and by doing our parts towards a revival of religion and public virtue, and towards putting a stop to that abounding vice and corruption, which, if not reformed, will sooner or later bring down great mischiefs and calamities upon the Community.

It

It is proper to advertise the Reader, that a few passages in the following Reflections are a little altered, and some small additions made, suited to the present state of things among us. Some things that are here mentioned may, perhaps, be looked upon as not necessary to be now insisted on, particularly relating to the dreadful convulsions in the bowels of the earth, which seemed then to threaten us. But it may be of some use to remind us of those things which we are too apt to forget, and to revive upon our minds the impressions which were then made upon us : especially since we have no security, but that, if we do not prevent them by a real repentance and amendment, the same or the like awful judgments may yet overtake us.



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SERIOUS REFLECTIONS
ON THE
PRESENT STATE of THINGS
IN
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As a General and Public Fast is appointed by Authority, to be religiously observed by all his Majesty's subjects in these kingdoms, it highly concerneth us to endeavour, as far as in us lieth, to answer the important ends for which it is designed. The order is drawn up with great seriousness and solemnity: It is there acknowledged, that *the manifold sins and wickedness of these kingdoms have most justly deserved heavy punishments from the hand of heaven.* We are called upon to *humble ourselves before Almighty God, and, in a most devout and solemn manner, to send up our prayers and supplications to the Divine Majesty, to avert all those judgments which we most justly have deserved, to continue his mercies, and perpetuate the enjoyment of the Protestant Religion among us, and safety and prosperity to his Majesty's kingdoms and dominions.*

On

On this occasion several reflections naturally offer themselves to a serious and considerate mind, with reference to the present state of things among us.

We have been eminently distinguished above most other nations by happy privileges and advantages. Providence has blessed us with an abundance of those things, which are usually thought to contribute to the public prosperity and happiness. Never had any People a fuller enjoyment of liberty: a profusion of wealth has flowed in upon us by our wide extended commerce. We have had great advantages for improvement in the arts and sciences, and every branch of useful knowledge: especially that which is the most valuable and important of all others, the knowledge of religion in its truth and purity. The light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, freed from the absurdities, the superstitions, and idolatries, with which it hath been incumbered in many other countries professing the Christian Faith, hath long shone among us. The holy Scriptures are not locked up in an unknown tongue, nor confined to the studies of the learned, but are put into the hands of the people: so that all men may have access to that sacred rule of faith and practice, the original standard of the Christian religion. The treasures of knowledge are opened, and the public instruction so frequently and freely dispensed, that it may be said, that *wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets.*

It might be expected, that a people so distinguished by advantages for religious and moral improvement, should also be remarkably distinguished by the knowledge and practice of piety, wisdom, and virtue, and by a zeal for our holy religion.—But though it is to be hoped there are many among us, who are unfeignedly thankful for our inestimable privileges, and careful to make a right improvement of them; yet it cannot be denied, that a great corruption hath spread itself, and seems to be

growing among all orders and degrees of men. This is a very disagreeable subject: but the first step to a proper remedy, is to be duly sensible of the true state of our own case. Our wealth and plenty hath been abused to an amazing luxury, and our liberty to a boundless licentiousness. Many act as if they had no other way of showing that they are free, but by casting off all restraints, and setting themselves loose from all the ties of religion and virtue. Atheism hath appeared almost without disguise, or, which in effect comes to the same thing, the disbelief of a *Providence, of God's moral attributes and government, and of a future state.*—The most virulent reproach and contempt hath been cast upon the adorable Jesus, and the methods of our redemption and salvation by him. All that part of our duty, which more immediately relateth to the supreme Being, seemeth to be regarded by many as a matter of indifference. And the slightest observation may convince us, that there is a growing neglect of *public worship*, as if the properest way of shewing our gratitude to God for the glorious privilege we have of worshipping him according to the dictates of our own consciences, were not to render him any public homage, or religious worship at all. That *holy day*, which is by divine appointment, and by that of our own laws, set apart from wordly business and cares, for the purposes of religion, for receiving public instructions, and for attending on divine worship, hath been treated with great contempt.—And in this too many of those, who, by their authority and influence, should set a good example to others, have unhappily led the way. Can there be a greater contempt cast upon it, than to hold GAMING ASSEMBLIES on that day? And when this is done by persons of *rank*, can it be wondered at, that by the lower kind of people it is often the worst employed of any day in the week, and devoted to idleness and vice? And it cannot but give concern to every good mind, that an *Institution*, so admirably calculated for the

the advancement of religious knowlege, piety, and virtue, and for promoting good order in the community, should be so strangely perverted and abused.

Having mentioned the practice of GAMING, I cannot help observing, that among other unfavourable symptoms of the growing corruption among us, this is not the least, that that practice is of late years become more general, and carried to a greater excess, than has been known before in these kingdoms. The wisest men of all nations have been so sensible both of the pernicious effects of this vice to particular persons and families; and its ill influence on the community, that it would fill a large volume barely to recite the laws which have been made against it, both in former and later ages. Our own laws have fixed a brand upon it, and in effect declared the gain made by it to be dishonourable and infamous: yet is the being instructed in the mysteries of it, become a necessary part of education, whilst the seasoning the tender minds of young persons with principles of religion and just sentiments of things, and forming them to the worthiest practices, is in a great measure neglected.

But what affordeth the most melancholy apprehensions, is the great corruption and depravity of manners, which is so generally and justly complained of.—The most blasphemous abuse of the name of God, by shocking oaths and imprecations, and the most corrupt and wilful perjuries; drunkenness and excesses of riot, by which, but especially by the excessive drinking of distilled spirituous liquors, the health, morals, and religion, of the laborious and useful part of these kingdoms are well-nigh destroyed;—fired with this infernal poison, they are spirited to perpetrate and execute the most daring and mischievous enterprizes; and shaking off all fear and shame, become audaciously impudent in all manner of vice, lewdness, immorality, and profaneness,

pests, in defiance of all laws, human and divine.—But it does not stop here, its malignant influence reaches to the children yet unborn, who come half burnt up and shrivelled into the world, and who as soon as born, suck in this deadly poison with their mothers or nurses milk: so that if this worst of all plagues be suffered to go on, it will make a general havock, especially amongst the *soldiers, sailors, and laborious* part of the nation, who are manifestly degenerated from the more manly constitutions of preceding generations *.—It is to be la-

* See *Distilled Spirituous Liquors the Bane of the Nation*, 8vo, 2d edit. 1736, London. Dr. Stephen Hales's *friendly admonition to the drinkers of Gin, Brandy, and other Spirituous Liquors, which are so destructive of the industry, morals, health, and lives, of the people. A new edition with additions, and an appendix*,—and is in the catalogue of the books distributed by the *Society for promoting Christian Knowledge*, London.—This worthy divine and excellent philosopher (whose whole life has been usefully employed in promoting the honour of God, and the welfare of mankind) in a treatise upon the distilling of sea water, and the use of ventilators, &c. lately published, speaking of *distilled spirituous liquors*, says;—“How much
“therefore does it behove all, who have any concern for the honour and dignity of their own kindred species, any indignation
“at its being thus debased and disgraced, any bowels of pity for the
“vast multitudes, not less perhaps than a MILLION, that are yearly
“destroyed all over the world, by this moral as well as natural,
“and therefore worst of all evils, that ever beset unhappy man; to
“use their utmost endeavours to deliver mankind from this PEST?
“—But notwithstanding this astonishing ravage and destruction of
“the human species, yet the unhappy unrelenting nations of the
“world seem as unconcerned about it, as if only so many thousand,
“nay millions, of *caterpillars* or *locusts* were destroyed thereby.
“Was there ever a more important occasion to rouse the indignation of mankind? Can we be calm and undisturbed, when this
“MIGHTY DESTROYER rears up its invenomed head?—The most
“zealous advocates for *Drams*, even the unhappy besotted *Dramists*
“themselves, the prolonging of whose lives, and whose real welfare, both *here* and *hereafter*, is hereby sincerely intended, cannot find fault with this well-meant remonstrance, in defence of
“them, and of all mankind, against this universal destroyer, from
“one who has long been labouring, and that not without success,
“in finding means to preserve multitudes of lives, by various
“means.”

mented ; for it cannot be denied, that dissoluteness and impurity of all kinds, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, abound among us, and are by many looked upon as no faults at all, or very slight ones, and which they rather glory in than are ashamed of, though *St. Paul* tells us they are not fit to be named amongst Christians.—To which may be added, the horrid crime of SELF-MURDER, more frequent with us than with other nations, and which is not only practised, but pleaded for ; a practice deservedly rendered infamous by our laws, as being a murder committed by a man upon his own person, in opposition not only to the most sacred obligations of religion, and the rights of the community, but to the strongest instincts of the human nature, wisely implanted in us by the great Author of our Beings, as a bar to such monstrous practices.—Nor can it be thought improper on this occasion to mention that barbarous practice of men's murdering one another upon a pretended *point of honour*, as it is called, for the most slight and trivial offences, below the cognizance of our laws : —A crime inexcusable in a civilized country, and which yet generally passes unpunished, and thus leaves the guilt of blood upon the land, crying aloud for vengeance.—It is impossible for a thinking man that has a true zeal for the honour of God, and the interests of religion and virtue, and who hath the welfare and happiness of his country really at heart, not to be deeply affected with such a view of things, and solicitous what the consequence may prove.

And now, it is a natural enquiry, what can this be owing to ? Whence can it be, that nations so happily privileged, and favoured with so many advantages for the knowledge and practice of religion, should have sunk into such an amazing corruption and degeneracy ? Can this be consistently charged on religion itself, either the Christian religion or the Protestant, which is the religion of Jesus, as taught in the holy Scriptures, and freed

freed from the abuses and corruptions that have been brought into it? The Deists have pretended the first, the enemies to the reformation the last. The answer to both is in effect the same. Can that be the cause of corruptions among Christians, which if steadily adhered to is the best remedy against those corruptions? Can that occasion an abounding in vice and wickedness, which, if really believed and seriously considered, exhibiteth the most powerful dissuatives from it, that can enter into the human mind? Can the furnishing the people with the means of knowlege, and bringing them to an acquaintance with the holy Scriptures, which are able to make us *wise unto salvation*, and are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*, can this have any tendency to encourage them in vice and dissoluteness? Such a supposition is contrary to the plainest dictates of common sense. The corruption therefore complained of can never be the natural effect or product of our advantages, and especially of the religion we profess. On the contrary, the best and surest preservative against this growing corruption, and the most effectual way of recovering from it, would be to have a high esteem for those divine oracles, to read and consider them with attention, and lay to heart the excellent instructions and directions which are there set before us.

There is a far more natural account to be given of that corruption of manners, that vice and wickedness which so much aboundeth among us. It is owing not to the knowlege or belief of religion, but to the neglect or contempt of it; to a strange indifferency towards it in some, whilst others use their utmost endeavours to traduce and expose it under the vilifying characters of superstition, priestcraft, or enthusiasm. Great numbers of impious books have been published among us, both formerly and of late: some of which are not only levelled against Christianity, but strike at the

foundations of all religion, the attributes and providence of God, and a future state of retributions. The manifest tendency of them has been—to banish the fear of the Deity, —to confound the moral differences of things, —to degrade the human nature to a level with the brutes, and thereby extinguish every noble and generous sentiment, —to deprive good men of the blessed hope of immortality, and to free bad men from the fears of future punishments, and the apprehensions of a Supreme Governor and Judge.—These principles, and the books that contain them, have been propagated with great eagerness and industry, both in these kingdoms, and in our plantations abroad, and sometimes at a considerable expence. This preposterous kind of zeal for infidelity may, to a considerate observer, seem to be an odd phænomenon, of which no rational account can be given. One may, in some degree, account for a man's being hurried away by the violence of his appetites and passions, to do what his own mind disapproves and condemns. But that any man should coolly take pains to set other men loose from all the restraints of religion and conscience, and thereby, as far as in him lies, attempt to dissolve the bands of society and public order, and encourage men to gratify and fulfil their appetites and passions without controul, the natural consequence of which would be to introduce universal confusion, in which he himself may be a great sufferer, is absolutely unaccountable on any principles of good sense or sound policy; so that, if we did not see frequent instances of it, we should be apt to think it scarce possible, that any men in their senses should act so strange a part.

One very pernicious consequence of the attempts which have been made against religion is, the spreading prophaneness and dissoluteness of manners among the *lower* kind of people, who easily catch the contagion, when once men of *higher degree*, or at least that pretend to a superior sagacity, have set the example. And who
can

can, without deep concern, observe, that this is very much become the case among us at present? Great numbers of those, who belong to what ought to be the most industrious body of the people, are sunk into irreligion and vice. And, in proportion, as these prevail, they become averse to all honest labour and industry, and prone to the most flagitious crimes, which have the worst effect imaginable on the peace and good order of the community. And it is easy to see what mischief and confusion must thence ensue. A sober and industrious populace is the strength, the riches, the glory of a nation: but when those, that should be the labouring hands, become vicious and dissolute, they are prepared for every kind of wickedness and disorder. As, from their rank and education, they have, for the most part, little regard to the appearances of honour and decency, if at the same time they have cast off the ties of religion, and the fear of God, and are abandoned to their appetites and passions, what are they not capable of? It is an observation which hath generally held, and is verified by the experience of all ages, that *Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin, i. e. abounding vice and wickedness, is a reproach unto any people, i. e. it bringeth disgrace and misery upon them.* *Prov. xiv. 10.* When once a neglect of religion and a corruption of manners becometh general, it hath a natural tendency to dissolve and enervate a nation, and to extinguish true public spirit and a manly fortitude. Nor have any people long maintained their liberties, after having lost their probity and virtue.

Thus it is in the natural course of things, and thus it also is by the just judgment of God, and according to the stated rules of the divine procedure towards nations or large communities. God may, indeed, in his great wisdom and goodness, long bear with a degenerate people, and may even continue to pour forth many blessings upon them when they are in a corrupt state, especially

especially if there be a considerable remnant of good men still to be found among them. But when their sins are grown up to such a height, and have continued so long, that he doth not see fit to bear with them any longer, the measure of their iniquities is said to be full; the time is come for executing a severe vengeance upon them, and the punishment falls heavier for being so long delayed.

Whosoever duly considereth these things will be apt to think, that, according to the ordinary method of God's providential dealings towards backsliding nations and churches, we have too much reason to apprehend his righteous judgments. And it must be acknowledged, that there are many things, in the course of his late dispensations, which have an alarming appearance. God's judgments have been, in a remarkable manner, abroad in the earth. I need not enter into particulars. They are very well known, and fresh in our remembrance. There have been, to use our Saviour's emphatical expressions, *commotions and great earthquakes in divers places,—distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring: men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that shall come upon the earth*, Luke xxi. 9, 11, 25. Of so vast an extent were the amazing concussions, reaching to many parts of *Europe, Africa, and America*, at a great distance from one another, and in divers places producing such dreadful effects, even to the subversion of great and populous cities, that it looked as if God were about some great and remarkable work of judgment, *to punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquities*, as the prophet expresseth it, *Is. xiii. 11*. Surely every man, who believeth that there is a Providence which extendeth its care to mankind, must believe that it hath a special concernment in events of such a nature, which so nearly affect nations and large communities, and on which the lives and fortunes of so many thousands de-

pend.

pend. Though second causes are admitted, still it must be considered, that they are all under the direction and superintendency of God's sovereign providence, which so ordereth and over-ruleth the circumstances of things, and the course of natural causes, as to subserve the ends of his moral administration, with regard to his reasonable creatures, and to execute his Purposes towards them, whether in a way of judgment or of mercy. And, in every such case, we should fix our views not merely or principally on second causes, but should look above them to the Supreme Disposer, and endeavour to comport with the designs of his infinite wisdom and righteousness. Calamitous events of a public nature are not to be considered as concerning only the particular persons or people which immediately suffer by them. They have a more extensive view, and are designed and fitted to give instructive lessons to all mankind that hear of them. The natural tendency of all such dispensations is to awaken in the minds of men a holy fear of the Divine Majesty, and to give them a most affecting conviction of the vanity and instability of all worldly hopes and dependencies. The prophet *Isaiab*, after having described, in a very lively manner, the striking impressions that should be made upon the hearts of men, because of *the fear of the Lord, and the glory of his Majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth*, very properly adds, *Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?* Is. xi. 20, 21. Of what avail, in such a time of awful visitation, are the arts of human policy, the pomp of courts, or the power of mighty armies, or the riches and grandeur of the most populous and magnificent cities? The plain voice of such dispensations, a voice intelligible to all mankind, is this: *Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him*, Ps. xxxiii. 8. *The Lord is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble; and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation,*

dignation, Jer. x. 10. Surely we should be ready to cry out on such Occasions, *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints. Who would not fear thee, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy. For all nations shall come and worship before thee: for thy judgments are made manifest,* Rev. xv. 3, 4. The great use, which is to be made of such awful dispensations, is well expressed by the prophet, *Is. xxvi. 9. When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness; i. e. they ought to do so; and it is the natural tendency of such judgments, to engage them to do so.* The calamities inflicted upon others should be regarded by us as solemn warnings and admonitions, which it highly concerneth us to improve. The language of such dispensations, to all that hear of them, is the same with that of our Saviour to the *Jews*, when speaking of those persons on whom the tower of *Siloam* fell, and of those whose blood *Pilate* mingled with their sacrifices, *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,* Luke xiii. 3, 5. How inexcusable shall we therefore be, if, instead of laying these things seriously to heart, we continue careless and unaffected still, and go on in a thoughtless round of gaieties and pleasures, like those the prophet mentions, *Is. v. 12. The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.* Against such persons a solemn woe is there denounced. And elsewhere, speaking of some who continued to indulge themselves in luxury and riot, and all kinds of sensual mirth, at a time when the circumstances of things called for deep humiliation and repentance, he saith, *It was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts, surely this Iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of Hosts,* *Is. xxii. 12, 13, 14.*

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Whosoever carefully observeth the course of the divine dispensations towards us for some time past, will be sensible that we have had many warnings given us. But a few years ago the sword of war raged in one part of the united kingdom of *Great Britain*, and was near penetrating to the center of it, and threatened the subversion of that constitution, on which the preservation of our religion, laws, and liberties, in a great measure, dependeth; but, through the great goodness of God, our fears were, after some time, happily dispelled. More lately, encroachments have been made upon our possessions and plantations abroad, in which our national safety and prosperity are very nearly interested. And it ought not to be forgotten, that it is not long since a most dreadful calamity befel a kingdom, so very nearly connected with us in interest and alliance, that the calamity may be regarded as, in a considerable degree, our own. And, in fact, we have been great sufferers by it. Many lives were lost of his Majesty's subjects belonging to *Great Britain* and *Ireland*, and many more were, by the sudden subversion, either totally, or, in a considerable degree, deprived of their worldly substance, and reduced to circumstances of distress. A stop was put for a while to the course of a most advantageous commerce. The springs of our wealth were obstructed; and a great blow struck at our trade, in which we are so apt to place our confidence: and this at the very time when we were entering upon a war with a mighty nation, a war that threatened to be very hazardous, and which hath put us to a vast expence both of blood and treasure. That particular judgment, under which some of the neighbouring nations have so severely suffered, and which is the most dreadful of all others, hath greatly threatened us. It is but a very few years since that great city, which is the metropolis of these kingdoms, and the center of our wealth and commerce, felt an alarming shock, though, through the great mercy of God, it did little more than threaten and terrify. To

these things may be added, the pestilence amongst the cattle in *England*, which was of many years continuance, and seems not yet to be entirely extinguished : And the late great scarcity of corn in these kingdoms, which produced many affecting scenes of calamity and distress. And if this was not entirely owing to the inclemency of the seasons, but to the artful management of bad men, it is an humbling thought that there should be so many found among us, who for their own private gain are capable of attempting to heighten the calamity of the public. And it cannot but give great concern to every one, who wisheith well to the safety and prosperity of these nations, that, in a time of such danger from the common enemy, there hath appeared such a spirit of opposition to lawful authority and government, breaking forth into intestine tumults and commotions, and which, if not timely checked, tendeth to the subversion of all public order, and to the introducing anarchy and confusion.

Thus the divine judgments seem to be advancing upon us, and have gradually begun to operate. But such is the mercy and forbearance of God towards us, that he seems loth to inflict upon us the fierceness of his anger, or to pour forth all his wrath. He is pleased to give us previous warnings, to awaken and rouse us out of our security, that, by a timely repentance, and by humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, we may prevent the necessity of inflicting severer punishments. His hand is lifted up, but the awful stroke seemeth to be suspended for a while, as if he were unwilling to proceed to extremities with us. Upon considering these things, that most affecting exhortation comes to my mind, which God condescendeth to make by his prophet *Hosea*, with regard to his people *Israel*, when in a very degenerate backsliding state, *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel ? How shall I make thee as Admah ? How shall I set thee as Zeboim ?*

Zeboim? *Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee,* Hos. xi. 8, 9. Yet we find, at length, upon their obstinately persisting in their disobedience and ingratitude, and abusing the methods of his indulgence, and even growing more and more corrupted, he saw it necessary to execute his awful judgments upon them, even to the utter subverting that kingdom, and subjecting it to a foreign yoke. God forbid that this should be our case. Let us therefore make a right use of the divine forbearance. We have hitherto had reason to *sing of mercy as well as of judgment*. Let us not, by our abuse of his goodness, provoke him to pour forth upon us the full vials of his penal wrath. With an ingenuous sorrow, and self-abasement, we should acknowledge our aggravated transgressions, our neglect and abuse of the privileges and advantages we have so long enjoyed, the contempt that hath been cast on his glorious Gospel, and the prophaneness and dissoluteness of manners, which hath so much prevailed. On these accounts, let us humble ourselves deeply before God, and implore his mercy, and contribute, as far as is in our power, to the carrying on a work of national repentance and reformation. It is undoubtedly our duty, in the present conjuncture of affairs; when we are engaged in an hazardous and expensive war, to exert our utmost efforts for assisting and supporting the government, and to apply ourselves to the use of all proper means which human prudence may suggest. But still we must get this fixed upon our minds, that whatever projects may be formed for procuring national advantages, and promoting the public prosperity, all other expedients to make a people flourish without reformation of manners, and without the knowledge and practice of religion and public virtue, however they may seem to have an

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effect for a while, will, in the issue, prove ineffectual and vain.

The most proper way we can take to avert impending judgments, to preserve and maintain our valuable privileges, and promote the public welfare and happiness, is not to express a clamorous zeal for liberty, at the same time that we abuse it to an unrestrained licentiousness, than which nothing hath a greater tendency, both through the righteous judgment of God, and in the nature of the thing, to deprive us of our liberties; but it is to endeavour to make a just and wise improvement of our advantages, to maintain a strict regard to *religion, probity, and purity of manners*, and to guard against *vice, libertinism, prophaneness, and debauchery*. This, and this alone, will preserve us a free, a flourishing, and happy people. God grant that this may be the blessing of these nations to the latest posterity; and that we may long enjoy the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shining among us in its genuine purity, and the inestimable advantage of a freedom to profess it, and to worship God according to the directions of his word, and the dictates of our own consciences, without being exposed to persecuting rage and violence. Happy nations that we still are! if we be but duly sensible of our happiness! and careful to make a right use of our privileges! What a glorious face of things would soon appear among us, if, as we have the best religion in the world, we took care to govern ourselves by its sacred rules, and to act under the influence of its divine instructions and important motives! Virtue, supported and animated by the glorious hopes of the Gospel, would appear in its genuine sacred charms, and in its lovely beauty and excellence. Love, the true spirit of Christianity, would prevail, and produce a mutual forbearance in lesser differences, at the same time that there would be a happy agreement in matters of the highest importance: there
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would be a zeal without bigotry, a liberty without licentiousness. The natural consequence of all this would be peace and harmony in larger and lesser societies. Such would be the face of things among us, as far as could be expected in this state of imperfection, if the religion of Jesus were firmly believed, and duly considered, and men would be more generally persuaded to give up themselves to its divine conduct. This would render persons in *high stations* signally useful to the public, and *ornaments* as well as *supports* to their country. And at the same time *sobriety, industry, temperance, and good order*, would spread among the body of the people. Nor would *true bravery* and *fortitude* be wanting. For though *superstition* tendeth to produce *mean* and *unmanly* fears, *true religion* and a *steady belief* of a *wise and righteous Providence*, hath a tendency to fortify and establish the mind, and to produce a real *courage* and *greatness of soul*, which will enable a man to meet death with a calm intrepidity in a noble and just cause, and stand the shock of the greatest terrors.

It is a reflection which hath frequently occurred to my mind, especially on occasion of the late dreadful judgments of God, how different, under the apprehension or pressure or an amazing calamity, must be the state of *one* that firmly believeth Christianity, and endeavoureth to govern his practice by its excellent rules, from that of the *Atheist* and *Unbeliever*, or of the man who though he professeth to believe the Christian religion, liveth in a plain contradiction to its sacred obligations. The former, however black and disastrous the face of things may appear to be, which naturally tends to create fears in the human mind, yet is persuaded, that all things are under the direction of infinite wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, and that we live in a world where every thing above, beneath, and on every side of us, is in the hand of God, and under the direction of his Providence; who, as he can arm all the creatures

tures against us, and make them the instruments of his just displeasure; so, if we be careful to please him, and approve ourselves in his sight, can make the whole creation around us to be as it were in a covenant of peace and friendship with us. Or, if a good man be involved in the same outward calamities with others, as must often, without a miracle, be expected in calamities which happen to large communities, still he hath this to support him, that the great Lord of the universe is his father and his friend, and will cause those outward evils to turn, in the final issue, to his greatest benefit. Death itself, if this shall befall him, shall prove a real gain to him, and shall introduce him to a better world, and a nobler society. It is justly observed concerning the *man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments, that he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord*, Ps. cxi. 1. 7. Not only may he say upon good grounds, with the Psalmist, *The Lord is on my side, I will not fear: what can man do unto me?* Ps. cxviii. 6. And again, *Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident*, Ps. xxvii. 2. But he may break forth into that noble strain of triumph, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea: Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof*, Ps. xlv. 1, 2, 3. On the other hand, the wicked and ungodly man, continuing such, hath no proper resource, no solid comfort or support in a day of calamity, when all things seem black and dismal about him. For either he looketh upon them to be the effects of a *wild chance*, or *blind necessity*, which cannot possibly be the object of a rational trust and confidence, and which leaves no room for hope, but in that which nature hath an abhorrence of, an utter extinction of being: or, he
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apprehendeth them to be the just judgments of the wise and righteous governor of the world, whom he hath offended by his sins. And vain it is to brave it against the wrath of heaven. Not to fear creatures like ourselves, in a just cause, argueth a noble and manly fortitude : but not to fear God, the Almighty Lord of the Universe, is not courage but madness. The only proper thing which remaineth for such persons to do, and it is what reason, as well as scripture, directeth to, is to humble themselves deeply under the mighty hand of God, and to flee to his infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ, in a hearty compliance with the most reasonable and gracious terms which he hath appointed, for obtaining an interest in his grace and favour.

Upon the whole, the best thing that can be wished, for the honour of God, for the happiness of mankind, and for the real welfare of our Country, is, that a hearty zeal for the knowlege and practice of our holy religion may have a revival among us : and that persons of all orders and conditions may join in contributing to promote its sacred interests. And notwithstanding the corruption too justly complained of, there are many, I am persuaded among us, and may the number of them daily increase, who are earnestly desirous to do this. Every man has it in his power to contribute something towards it, at least by endeavouring to *walk in a conversation becoming the Gospel*. But there are some persons who have peculiar advantages, for doing honour and service to Christianity. Those especially that are distinguished by their HIGH RANK, their FORTUNE and QUALITY, should make use of the influence this gives them for recommending and promoting true religion and virtue, which will add a lustre to their *titles* and *dignities*, and is one of the best ways they can take to shew their regard to the public happiness. MAGISTRATES should account it their duty and their honour to employ the authority they are invested with, for
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serving the interests of religion, and discountenancing vice and wickedness; since for this purpose they are appointed, that they *may be for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.* And it is then that their authority will have its proper influence, when it is strengthened by that of their own good example. But above all, they who are honoured with the character of the MINISTERS of the holy Jesus should make it the very business of their lives to spread and promote real vital Christianity, to instruct the people in its important doctrines, and build them up in their most holy faith, and to enforce upon them the excellent duties it enjoins, by all the powerful and most engaging motives which the Gospel sets before us. And that their instructions may have the proper effect, it highly concerneth them to keep themselves free from the *fashionable vices and follies* of the age, and to endeavour to be ensamples to their flocks, by a well-tempered zeal, piety, and charity, and the virtues of a holy life. Thus will they not only do the highest service to religion, but procure the greatest honour to themselves, and the most just veneration for their sacred character, which, where it is not disgraced by a conduct unworthy of it, naturally demandeth the esteem and regard of all the true friends to religion and virtue.

For these valuable and excellent purposes, may the God of all grace pour forth his holy Spirit upon all orders and degrees of men in these nations, that, as they bear the honourable name of Christians, they may *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and, being filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work.*